

Montana

(Source: *Montana Standards for Social Studies, 2000*, Montana Office of Public Instruction)

The five criteria: An overview

Are the essentials of a civic core specified clearly?	Are the topics teachable within the allotted timeframe?	Do the documents provide a scope and sequence?	Is the essential content required of all students?	Are the important facts and ideas presented coherently across subjects?
☆	☆	★	☆	☆

Standards that largely meet the criteria are designated with a full star [★]; standards that partially meet the criteria are designated with a half star [☆]; and standards that do not meet the criteria are designated with an empty star [☆].

Summary:

Of its twelve pages, six of Montana's *Standards for Social Studies* are on standards. These do not fully meet any of the criteria for citizenship education. Montana calls itself a local control state and tries to hold to an imaginary line between "standards" and "curriculum." On Criterion #1, the single specific required, not a mere example, is the Constitution. All "standards" are analyses of learning, not learning itself. To meet them honestly would overflow school time, contrary to Criterion #2. The material is arranged by grade span partially satisfying Criterion #3, but there is no way to tell whether the sequence of courses has been thought about seriously. Many specifics needed to deal with these standards would have to be taught at all school levels. In a state with wholly local choice of content (while planning "aligned" statewide testing), Criterion #4 has no meaning. Content cannot be offered to all students until what is essential is decided upon. On Criterion #5, there is no content to be integrated.

Particulars:

Benchmarks to meet the six standards are listed in three columns, for the end of grades four and eight, and "Upon Graduation-End of Grade 12." Standard #1 has students "access, synthesize, and evaluate information to communicate and apply social studies knowledge to real world situations." Presumably any situation deemed real will do, since benchmarks suggest none in particular. This invites schools to intellectual segregation, asking "good" students to learn while ignoring others. A twelfth-grade benchmark under standard #2, civics, asks students to "identify representative political leaders and philosophies from selected historical and contemporary settings." In grade eight geography, students are asked to explain "how movement patterns throughout the world (e.g., people, ideas, diseases, products, food) lead to interdependence and/or conflict." In grade twelve history, they should "interpret how selected cultures, historical events, periods, and patterns of change influence each other." For grade twelve economics, they "compare and contrast how values and beliefs influence economic decisions in different economic systems."

As in other states, vague and overstated expectations in all three grade clusters tempt teachers and students to believe that broad intellectual questions have been explored. This is both misleading and totally contrary to the expressed purpose of this document: "Social Studies addresses political, economic, geographic, and social processes that allow students to

make informed decisions for personal and public good.”

On pages eight-eleven, even more impenetrable “Performance Standards” are listed as advanced, proficient, nearing proficiency, and novice, for grades four, eight, and twelve. These are squeezed down, abstract versions of the already abstract benchmarks. The advanced and proficient categories are unreal. Even after thirteen years of schooling, no student, no matter how bright or lucky, could be expected to live up to these wish-lists. Teachers who have looked to the documents for guidance are likely to have concluded that its grand words are not seriously meant, only a needless distraction from the sensible curricula most of them probably offer already.